

The Cavalry Team: Scout-Tank Integration

by First Lieutenant Leif Nott and First Lieutenant Ryan Popple

"The reconnaissance detachments are responsible for seeking out and reporting as much as they can, without drawing attention to themselves. They must be speedy and agile, have a good range, possess good means of communication, and be responsive to command... If their task demands something heavier in the way of fighting capacity this must be forwarded to them."¹

— Major General Heinz Guderian

The armored cavalry troop is the best trained and best equipped unit in the U.S. Army to win the reconnaissance fight. The combination of cavalry fighting vehicles, main battle tanks, and heavy mortars, make the heavy cavalry troop one of the most powerful and flexible elements on the modern battlefield. While there is much information available on the doctrinal employment of the cavalry troop, scout platoon, or tank platoon, the scout-tank team is an often practiced yet doctrinally neglected organization. This article explores several useful tactics, techniques, and procedures for developing and executing effective scout-tank cooperation.

Using combined arms cooperation at the lowest unit level ensures that the cavalry troop retains the initiative during the reconnaissance and security fight. The most important benefit of scout-tank cooperation is that it allows the cavalry troop to use the most appropriate system against a threat, which leads to greater survivability and an economy of force. If the scout and tank platoons successfully cooperate on the battlefield, the tanks will be in the right place at the right time to maximize combat power and the scouts will be free to continue reconnaissance and not become decisively engaged by superior enemy forces.

Missions of a Cavalry Troop: Tank and Scout Platoon Roles

The heavy cavalry troop is a unique organization that allows troop commanders flexibility to accomplish various missions. The diversity of its organic elements affords the troop commander this flexibility. The missions of a heavy cavalry troop are reconnaissance, security, and economy of force:

- Reconnaissance missions include route reconnaissance, zone reconnaissance, and area reconnaissance.
- Security missions include screening, area security, and convoy security.
- Economy of force includes offensive operations such as hasty attack, attack, and movement to contact; defensive missions such as defending a battle position and defending in sector; and retrograde missions such as delay.

The tank and scout platoons in each cavalry team work together to accomplish troop missions, though their roles are not the same. In most missions, the tank and scout platoons have very different roles. It is the simultaneous execution of these two different elements that ensures the cavalry team's success.

During reconnaissance, the scout platoon is the main effort. The scout platoon's mission tends to be identical to the troop's mission, with task and purpose being the same. The tank platoon mission should emphasize its ancillary role to the scout platoon, emphasizing that the tank platoon follows and supports its sister platoon until substantial enemy contact is made. The tank platoon prepares a hasty attack or defense to preserve the scout platoon's combat power.

During security missions, the relationship between the scout and tank platoons remains unchanged. The scout platoon's mission is still identical to the troop's mission. The tank platoon gives depth to the security mission. While not expected to make first contact with enemy forces, the tank platoon is expected to react quickly and violently. It is also important to note that during security operations, the scout platoon must ensure that the tank platoon's lo-



cation is not exposed to enemy reconnaissance.

During economy of force missions, the tank platoon is the main effort. All offensive operations revolve around allowing the tank platoon to maneuver to a tactically advantageous and decisive spot on the battlefield to maximize its combat power. During the defense, the tank platoon anchors in the troop defense while the scout platoon covers the flanks.

Cavalry Team Task Organization

The cavalry team's flexibility allows it to array its individual vehicles to accomplish the diverse missions of division cavalry units. In some tactical situations, an immediate response across the entire forward line of own troops may require a cavalry team's tanks to spread out behind scout sections. In other tactical situations, the factors of mission, enemy, terrain, troops, time, and civilians may dictate that the tank platoons be massed to most effectively respond to greater enemy threats. The scout and tank platoon leaders must organize their cavalry team to meet



different situations. This article identifies two methods of task organizing a cavalry team: the hunter/killer concept and the quick reaction force (QRF). The authors have successfully employed both methods during many tactical scenarios.

During the Vietnam conflict, heavy cavalry troops were composed of platoons designed for the hunter/killer concept. These platoons were one-half M48/M60 tanks (the killers) and one-half M113 Armored Cavalry Fighting Vehicles (the hunters). Tankers and scouts worked together at the platoon level. Modern cavalry troops are composed of pure tank and scout platoons. While this change facilitates training focus on specific MOS and weapons platforms, the cohesion necessary for effective cavalry team operations is removed.

Hunter/killer works by providing the scout section tank support in the immediate area. This denies the enemy the ability to react, because the enemy will be unable to maintain contact. The scouts will make contact with the enemy and call for tank support from the

sister tank platoon while continuing reconnaissance, allowing tanks to destroy the enemy. Used successfully, both scout and tank platoons maintain momentum. The distance between the scout and tank platoon is not fixed. The tank platoon should not be so close that it makes contact with the enemy at the same time as the scouts, but should not be so far away that it cannot be in position to quickly destroy the enemy.

Hunter/killer is most effective during reconnaissance missions, where enemy contact is most likely at the individual vehicle or section level. Due to this limited enemy contact, it is possible to divide a tank platoon into sections without jeopardizing its combat power. Additionally, it further disrupts the enemy's counterreconnaissance objectives because the enemy is unable to identify the cavalry team's focus. To further disrupt the enemy's counterreconnaissance, scouts and tanks should continuously communicate with each other. Scouts should look for ideal tank routes, hide positions, and fighting positions as they maneuver through a zone. As these routes and positions are identified, they should be reported to

the tank platoon. Scouts also need to continuously update the tank platoon on the location of each scout element to prevent fratricide and decrease response time. Tanks should use covered and concealed positions to avoid enemy detection. Tank platoon leaders should also minimize using formations, as they tend to expose armored vehicle movement. The tank platoon should also keep the scout platoon leader informed on the tank's location, activity, and RED-CON level.

The advantages of the hunter/killer concept lie in decentralized decision-making. The concept also provides additional resources to the reconnaissance effort. Most reconnaissance forces in the security role will allow superior contact to bypass their positions. The tanks provide an additional reconnaissance team with thermal-sight capabilities to find and destroy these elements. The tank section should never assume an area is clear of enemy presence after the scouts have moved through the zone. Enemy reconnaissance forces will also follow engagement criteria, and it is often to their advantage to allow the scouts to bypass their positions and tar-

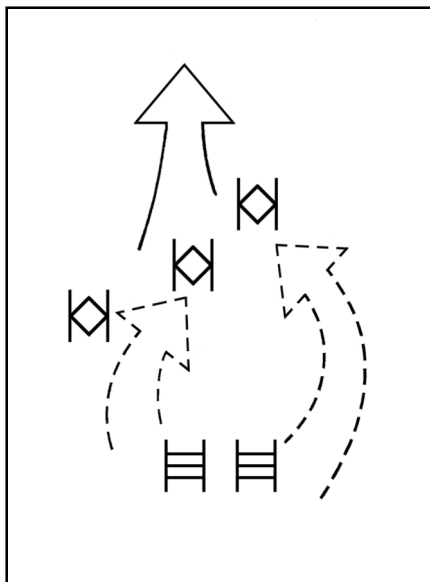


Figure 1. Hunter/Killer Technique

get tanks. This is especially true of dismounted guided missile teams.

The disadvantage of the hunter/killer technique is lack of mass and flexibility. Since tank sections are divided across a scout platoon's front, it makes it untimely and difficult to mass them on one location. If either platoon begins taking casualties, it is very difficult to maintain momentum without losing security. To avoid some of the tactical risks of becoming decisively engaged by a superior force, the engagement, bypass, tank mass, and troop mass criteria must be thoroughly briefed and rehearsed. In these situations, the troop abandons the split-vee hunter/killer organization and prepares for an economy of force mission.

A second option in task organizing and executing the scout-tank cavalry team is the quick reaction force (QRF) technique. The QRF structure uses the tank platoon as a potent and flexible reserve to the scout platoon. The QRF technique is most often used in security missions, especially on the screen line. In this structure, the scout platoon establishes a screen line forward of the no-penetration line to observe all infiltration routes into their assigned sector. It also selects displacement routes that do not interfere with the tank platoon's engagement areas. Depending on the terrain, weather, and visibility factors of the assigned area, the tank platoon establishes routes, platoon battle positions, and engagement areas. The triggers for the tank platoon are determined by either the troop commander, the scout platoon leader, or engagement criteria outlined in the operations order. When the conditions are met, the tank

platoon quickly reacts to a specific location and type of enemy contact.

Using the QRF technique places the scout platoon leader in tactical control of the tanks during the counterreconnaissance fight. It frees the tank platoon leader to conduct parallel operations, establishing the engagement area and timing the possible routes through the zone. While the scouts maintain security and reconnaissance, the tanks set the conditions for engagement. The level of preparation that the tanks may execute depends on several factors, including time available, enemy situation, observation into the sector, additional assets available to the tank platoon, and the threat of indirect or air attack. Ideally, the QRF technique maximizes the effects of preparation during the security mission. When the conditions of a security mission require the screen to be set immediately, a QRF approach enables the tanks to continue priorities of work while the scouts provide early warning.

The QRF technique ensures that the tanks deploy into combat in mass. The tank assets of the heavy cavalry troop are limited, and their proper employment is essential to defeating armor threats to the scout platoon. Whenever possible, mass should be used to provide concentration of fires, shock effect, and survivability. The QRF technique makes tank mass possible because of the reconnaissance information provided by the scouts. This information allows the commander to analyze the tactical risk of concentrating the tanks. The scouts also allow the tanks to fight in multiple engagement areas and to continuously ambush, engage, and destroy the approaching enemy.

Using the QRF technique, the engagement areas can be behind or ahead of the scout screen line. The availability of concealed positions is the primary consideration in deciding where to place the engagement area. If the engagement areas are established behind the screen line, as shown in Field Manual 17-97, *Cavalry Troop*, then it is assumed that the enemy will not detect scout observation posts

or has decided to bypass the observation posts.² Rather than gambling on the enemy choosing to bypass friendly scouts, it is favorable to never let the enemy decide. The scouts' concealment must be so thorough that the enemy will not detect them with or without thermal sights. The above consideration reinforces the importance of terrain analysis in choosing where to establish the engagement area and the observation posts. In certain terrain and thermal conditions, it is simply not possible to hide a platoon of scout vehicles along the suspected avenues of approach.

If the terrain allows the scouts to deploy forward of the proposed engagement areas, then the tanks are given the initiative in engaging the enemy. This situation gives the tank platoon ample time to prepare for the enemy entering an engagement area. The only disadvantage is the possibility of losing enemy contact. If the terrain allows the enemy to infiltrate the zone, then the scouts must ensure that they maintain some form of enemy contact after the enemy has bypassed the scout hide positions and observation posts. In most situations, the terrain does not permit placement of six concealed vehicle observation points. Any scout vehicles not placed directly on the forward screen line are used to provide depth to the screen. Thus, contact can be passed from scout to scout, and then to the tanks.

Another major consideration in placing the engagement areas behind the screen line is the risk of fratricide. Although vehicle identification can prevent some types of fratricide, there is

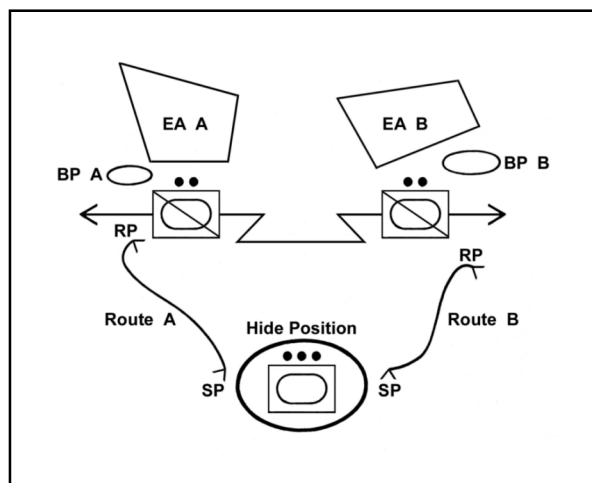


Figure 2. An example of the QRF technique. Scout platoon, in two sections, arrayed along a screen line while the tank platoon, in a hide position, prepares to engage in EA A or EA B.

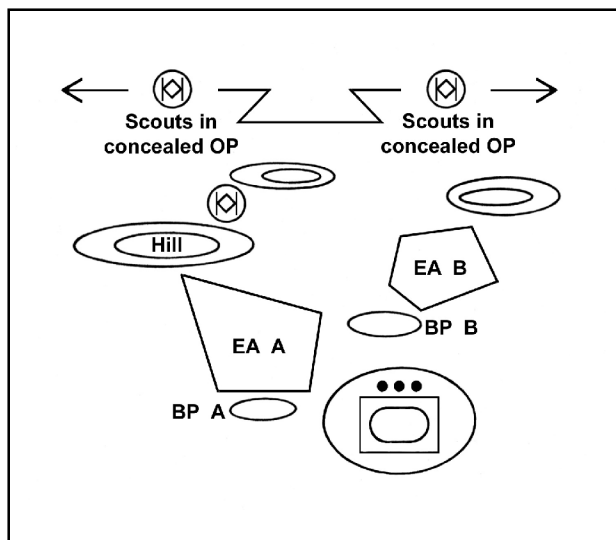


Figure 3. An example of a QRF technique in which the engagement areas are established behind the screen line. The primary considerations are concealing the scouts, maintaining contact with the enemy, and preventing fratricide.

also the risk of tank main gun rounds penetrating enemy vehicles and continuing into friendly scouts. A major terrain feature must be used to backstop the engagement area if the scouts must remain on the forward screen line. If the scouts have met their displacement criteria, there is also the risk of passing through the tank engagement area while in contact with the enemy.

Various techniques exist to aid the tanks in identifying the displacing scouts. These techniques include gun-tube orientation, combat identification panels, chemical lights, infrared lights, signal pyrotechnics, and radio coordination. Regardless of the technique used, it is thoroughly rehearsed and understood by every soldier in the troop. This type of operation is a major tactical risk for the scouts due to the difficulty of displacing while maintaining contact with a superior enemy force. The troop mortars and air cavalry helicopters can be of great assistance in this situation. The risks to the scout platoon are lowered if they choose a route that avoids the tank engagement area, but this makes the task of maintaining enemy contact much more difficult.

If the terrain and other mission factors preclude the troop from establishing the engagement area behind the scouts, then another form of the QRF technique can be more effective. Establishing the engagement areas forward of the scouts reduces several tactical risks. The importance of placing the scouts in perfect hide positions is lowered because the enemy will never be allowed to close with the scouts and bypass or

destroy them. Displacing the scouts is also a more simplified tactical task in this scenario because the tanks are forward to suppress and destroy the advancing enemy. As the tanks make enemy contact, the scouts can concentrate on survivability and movement rather than maintaining enemy contact. If displacement is a tactical necessity, the scouts can guard the flanks or support the tanks with long-range TOW missile fires. The scouts should not risk fighting along side the tanks unless

their additional firepower is required. The ability of the tank platoon to survive and win direct fire engagements is vastly superior to the scout platoon. The scouts must ensure that they survive to provide their critical task on the battlefield — reconnaissance.

The disadvantage of this technique is the difficulty of moving the tanks into position to intercept the enemy. The tanks must be prepared to move to any location on the screen line to engage enemy armor. During an extended screen mission, a tank platoon might support a 10-kilometer section of the screen line. In certain terrain, tank movement is severely restricted. The tanks should time the routes to each possible engagement area to provide the scouts with their requirement of how early they must identify enemy contact. The longer it will take the tanks to deploy to the correct engagement area, the further out the scouts must identify the enemy. Proper vehicle identification from the scouts is critical to avoid a premature commitment of the tanks. The scouts must win the counterreconnaissance fight to ensure that the tanks win the armor fight. If the tank platoon is repeatedly committed to destroy enemy reconnaissance vehicles, the risk of the enemy properly identifying the screen line and disabling tanks with indirect fires or close air support increases.

In a QRF concept, preparation and timing will determine the cavalry team's success. Scout platoon leaders must develop a sense for tactical patience and timing. Prematurely deploying a tank platoon can be as ineffective as

not deploying at all. Additionally, in a heavy troop, scouts must remember that they are an armored reconnaissance unit, capable of destroying significant enemy contact. Troop commanders and scout platoon leaders should select engagement and hand-off criteria that efficiently balance the capabilities of the scout and tank platoons.

General Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures

The key to an effective cavalry team is in the approach the scout and tank platoon leaders take to bring the two platoons closer together. Along with training, developing cohesion, and conducting preparation together, the two platoons must also execute as one element. There are several techniques, tactics, and procedures that give the cavalry team this sense of unity. The soldiers of each platoon must understand the benefits of the cavalry team. This is accomplished through team-building and collective training. Social and sporting events, garrison details, physical training, or any tasking that requires manpower, are opportunities to pair up members of the two platoons.

During field training, combining the troop leading procedures also results in unit cohesion. The scout and tank platoon leaders must develop a scheme of maneuver together. During plan development, they should constantly consider the other platoon's actions throughout the mission. Another technique is to have soldiers from both platoons build one large terrain model. The tank and scout platoons can stagger their operations order time and brief from the same terrain model. Later, they can gather both platoons together at the terrain model and conduct rehearsals. This maximizes Bradley and tank commander interaction, and ensures that everyone understands the same plan. During reconnaissance missions, this allows tank and Bradley commanders to know the specific vehicles that are mutually supporting one another. It increases response time during the mission. For example, Green 2 (tank) is informed that Blue 3 (scout) has made contact. He immediately knows which direction to move without any further information, because during the rehearsal, Green 2 learned where Blue 3 would be operating.

During mission execution, additional procedures create a stronger cavalry team. The key consideration is situational awareness. Although digital equipment, such as Force XXI battle

command battalion/brigade and below alleviates some of the voice reporting traffic, the scout and tank platoons need to constantly communicate and share information. Monitoring each other's radio net is essential. In a QRF technique, a tank platoon leader can react instantaneously to scout contact if he monitors the scout net. In the hunter/killer concept, one of the scouts can keep the tank platoon frequency in the second radio. This allows the scout to guide the tanks directly to contact, increasing effectiveness to close with and destroy enemy contact. Any combination of overlapping the tank and scout radio communication can be effective as long as it reduces time between scout contact and tank action.

Using guide vehicles ensures that tanks and scouts are mutually supportive. In certain low-visibility terrain or weather conditions, using a scout guide vehicle makes a tank section's or platoon's movement quick and synchronized with the scout platoon's movement. This also reduces fratricide among scouts and tanks because the guide vehicle can set the tank section or platoon in a hasty battle position as well as orient the tank's field of fire.

Another technique lies in the conduct of casualty evacuation. Traditionally, platoon sergeants are responsible for the casualty evacuation of their platoons. If both platoons take casualties, each platoon sergeant conducts casualty evacuation, reducing the combat power of the cavalry team by at least two cavalry fighting vehicles and two tanks. A cavalry team can maintain more combat power in the fight by designating the scout platoon sergeant (or any Bradley commander) to evacuate all casualties. This maintains the most combat power possible to continue the mission. Scout vehicles, such as a Bradley, are better suited to carry litter patients, while tanks are more useful in the direct firefight.

Additional Assets

In the heavy cavalry squadron, there are many assets, organic and attached, that enhance the cavalry team's combat power. Three additional assets often attached to the ground cavalry team are

indirect fire support, air support, and engineer support. Organic to the troop, a cavalry team has a 120mm mortar section. Organic to the squadron, OH-58D Kiowa Warrior helicopters are a powerful asset for the cavalry team. Finally, attached assets, such as engineer units, broaden the capabilities of a cavalry team.

It is important to focus on the indirect fires due to the troop-organic mortar section and the attached fire support officer (FSO). Scout and tank platoon leaders and platoon sergeants should become well versed in the capabilities



Scout and tank platoon leaders conduct combined rehearsals.

of the mortar section. Understanding the technical aspects of mortar fire, such as ammunition selection, range, and rate of fire, allow for better integration of indirect fires and maneuver elements. Additionally, scout and tank platoon leaders should ensure a positive working relationship with the troop FSO. Primarily, it is through the FSO that a cavalry team will be calling for indirect fires. Scout platoon leaders especially should brief the FSO on the cavalry team's scheme of maneuver. Together they should develop a fire support plan that assists the maneuver of the scout and tank platoons. Scouts should learn how to select a good mortar firing point. This allows the scouts to inform the mortar tracks on the terrain ahead and expand their options when the mortars are required to jump to their next firing point. In the same manner, scouts should report to the FSO on suitable observation points for the fire support team vehicle.

Air cavalry support is especially useful during limited visibility. A divi-

sional cavalry squadron has two troops of OH-58D Kiowa Warriors. At any time, a cavalry team can count on one to two helicopters in its area of operations. Air scouts have many practical ways of improving the cavalry teams' situational awareness. Generally, air scouts will be the first to observe an area of operations. They are effective at clearing terrain from a distance as the cavalry team begins its zone reconnaissance. Air scouts also do a great job of quickly clearing lateral avenues of approach. They can clear natural obstacles like riverbeds, wadis, and canyons. Additionally, they can clear dead space through which a cavalry team may not be able to maneuver. Finally, air scouts improve maneuver through overwatch. During passage of lines, air scouts can provide security or maintain contact as scouts displace rearward. They allow for smooth transitions between a cavalry team and a follow-on task force.

Engineer assets work with cavalry teams much the same way they support any maneuver element. Mobility, countermobility, and survivability all are augmented through engineer units. During reconnaissance missions, minelaying platoons work very well at sealing off avenues of approach or named areas of interest. During security missions, engineer assets have even more uses. Digging assets allow a tank platoon to build more survivable battle positions. Mine layers can canalize enemy avenues of approach, allowing scout platoons to execute an extended screen line or allowing tanks to build a more effective engagement area. The engineers can also deceive the enemy as to the strength, composition, and disposition of the cavalry troop. Deception fighting positions, which are shallow and quick to build, can deceive the enemy reconnaissance as to the location and number of tanks in the sector.

Regardless of the type of attachment augmenting the cavalry team, scout and tank platoon leaders must do everything possible to incorporate these assets. They must exchange information with the attachment leader, teach them about the cavalry team and learn detailed asset capabilities. This maximizes the combat power of the cavalry team, but most importantly, leads to suc-

cessful operations. Preventing fratricide is another consideration when integrating attachments. Soldiers need to be familiar with all friendly equipment on the battlefield. Leaders should not only exchange information with each other, but they should share that same information with platoons and sections. Leaders should also find ways to reinforce this knowledge. If an air defense section were attached to a scout platoon, the platoon leader could coordinate to boresight with the new vehicles. This forces the scout crews to view unfamiliar vehicle at long ranges with multiple sights.

Armored and mechanized forces are designed to advance quickly on the modern battlefield. The cavalry units that support these forces must accomplish the reconnaissance mission quickly and carefully. The combination of speed and caution is difficult to balance. All mechanized units face the problem of maintaining security while rapidly advancing toward the mission's objective. This problem is an even greater challenge to an armored reconnaissance unit because they must quickly advance, often lacking specific knowledge of the terrain or enemy situation to the front.

The assets of the scout platoon allow for hasty reconnaissance and movement, while the assets in the tank platoon allow for rapid destruction of enemy forces. Combined correctly, the two elements facilitate expedient movement and decisive actions on contact. Armored reconnaissance is difficult and seldom successful without close coordination between the scout and tank platoons.

To accomplish the mission and survive, the cavalry troop must locate, outmaneuver, and decisively engage the enemy reconnaissance forces. If the heavy cavalry troop loses a fight, it no longer provides critical intelligence information to the commander. The scout and tank platoons must provide detailed reconnaissance information while maintaining combat power. These two distinct platoon elements greatly enhance each other's ability to accomplish the mission. An effective scout-tank cavalry team embodies the finest virtues of cavalry tradition — speed, responsive maneuver, and leverage. This team is most deadly when it retains the initiative and chooses the engagement area. The platoon leaders and noncommissioned officers in each platoon should seek opportunities in garrison and tacti-

cal training to build a lethal cavalry team. The rewards of such teamwork are evident in improved camaraderie and decisive battlefield maneuver.

Notes

¹Guderian, Heinz, *Achtung-Panzer: The Development of Armoured Forces, Their Tactics and Operational Potential*, Arms and Armour Press, London, 1992, p. 164.

²U.S. Army Field Manual 17-97, *Cavalry Troop*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1995.

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